

Date: April 26, 1974

Place: Harper Residence, 2115 Sherman, Evanston, Illinois.

Interview with: Milton Harper.

Observations: Mr. Harper was removing storm windows when I arrived, so I pitched in for a few minutes. He's retired and has lived in Evanston, except for a few brief departures, since 1898. The purpose of this interview was to gather additional information on the academic program of the high school, and on the principal. Mr. Harper proved to be an interesting, articulate subject.

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Q. Would you mind if I took notes?

A. No, go right ahead; be my guest; in fact you might want to sit here (pointed to table on porch).

Q. Have you lived in Evanston for your entire life?

A. Yes, I was born in Evanston right where the Hotel Orrington is. It was on the second floor of a double house. That was in 1898; 76 years ago in September, September 5th. Then my father built this house in 1901.

Q. Do you know what happened to the old house?

A. I do. I believe that it was razed for the construction of the hotel. I'm not sure of the exact date, though.

Q. Was your father a builder?

A. No, actually he had the house built. He lived in Evanston for most of his life, but was a lawyer and worked in Chicago. Malcom Harper was his name.

Q. Now as I mentioned over the phone, what I'm really interested in is the Evanston Township High School during that era, and I believe it was an era, when Mr. Beardsley was the principal.

A. Ah, yes. I believe that he was the principal for maybe ten years before I was there and it seems at least ten years after I was there.

Q. I'm looking forward to hearing about him, but could we first catch up on grammar school?

A. I attended the Emerson Grammar School from 1904 through 1912. That was located not far from here on the corner of Elm and Noyes. Then I attended the old High School. That was located if I'm not mistaken on the corner of Elmwood and Dempster. The southeast corner. That was Evanston's second high school. The first one was constructed in 1883 or 1884. The exact date's on the record at the Historical Society and you can check it. Anyway it burned down, although I'm not sure. I went to the second. I think that it burned down, too; but after the school had already moved to the present site.

Anyway, while I was there, there was agitation for a new and bigger school with more area, for quite along time before the site was acquired.

Q. Did your parents discuss this at all?

A. No, I have no first hand information on the agitation. And most of it came after I left in 1916. (left the school) Even my youngest brother graduated from the old school. No, the new







school was not a live issue for us.

Q. Were your parents in favor of the new school?

A. I have no recollection of them being against it on the part of my parents. Yes, they were in favor of good schools.

Q. The reason I asked about your parents there has to do with the politics of the new school. It seems that even though people of Evanston, such as your parents, took pride in their schools, they none-theless voted down several bond issues designed to raise money for a new school. Now as long as you were living at home bond issues and taxes may not have been your concern; however I'm sure that your parents were concerned. Did they ever -- did you ever hear them discussing this, perhaps over dinner?

A. (Laughed) No, not over dinner. No, there was never any discussion about bond issues or taxes. I know we were always hardput to pay taxes. Even though my father was a lawyer, his income was not that good, and it was always difficult to add on more taxes. But there was never any discussion.

Q. Did you and your brother --

A. Brothers, there were three of us. I was the oldest.

Q. Thanks. Did you and your brothers work after school?

A. Yes, during the fall and spring, and sometimes well into the fall we did lawn care and general yard work. Mostly for people in Evanston. A lot of young boys did that.

Q. Yes, I know. I was talking to someone just the other day who also did lawn work. Apparently he did quite well, I believe.

A. (Small laugh) Well, it gave us boys spending money; and a little something in the bank. Who was it you were talking to?

Q. Tom Kees. Perhaps you know him, although I think that he may have been two or three years behind you in school. He was a senior, or actually would have been a senior when the United States entered the war. Now he works in Lemoi's Hardware.

A. An older man. I just know of him as Tom.

Q. Probably him. Very friendly.

A. No, I never knew him, never even knew that he came from Evanston.

Q. I'm changing a bit from some other questions I wanted to ask, but did you know many or most of the people about your age in Evanston High School?

A. Well, I was not really the socialite. I usually went to school and came home, and then did lawn work in the warm months. And if he (Kees) was behind me I probably wouldn't have known him for sure.

Q. Do you recall -- and this might be a bit far-fetched -- do you recall who your senior class officers were?

A. I could tell you, but I'll do you one better. I'll show you a picture if you'd like it.

Q. That would be perfect. (Mr. Harper exited and returned with the class picture for the class of 1916.

A. This is the class, or actually only part of it. It turns out that there were about 130 in the class and only about 85 showed up for the picture. Don't know why the other's didn't. I'm







sitting here. (He pointed to a picture of himself, then pointed to two other men: Harry Conover, he was the president; and Richard Schuyler, he was the vice-president.

Q. Is Mrs. Harper in the picture?

A. No, she graduated six years after I did.

Q. Do you remember most of the people here?

A. No, but I'm surprised by how many I could name. I found the picture while I was rummaging through an old closet--

Q. Ah! The old closet!

A. -- and sent it off to the Historical Society in November. Here's a copy of the letter. And here's a copy of the reply, and as you can see, it's dated February. (Letter indicates, with exclamation, that original letter had only recently arrived, perhaps a month and one half late.) After I got it back, the high school sent me a list of class members. I took the picture and the list around to two other class mates, two women who live in the Madison House (a rest home). We figured out who all the checked names are. There's one other woman who lives in the apartment house across the street, Mrs. Elizabeth Stewart. And then there's another person who lives up in North Evanston. I'll take it up there next week to see if we can identify the others -- some of the others.

Q. Did most of your friends go to the public high school?

A. Yes. There was one other school in Evanston. Northwestern University ran a prep school. Northwestern Academy is what it was called. It used to occupy Fiske Hall, that's the red brick building right next to the lake. It used all of Fiske Hall. Now I've forgotten why it was discontinued, but it was tuition, and the public school was free.

Q. Without stepping on toes, I would like to get something of a profile, at least in a general sense, of the student body. Did most of the children of wealthy families attend the academy, or were they at the high school?

A. At school I don't think that we were really conscious of things like that. I know at school we weren't. Our family was what you might call the genteel poor. My mother attended the University of Illinois for two years, and my father didn't attend law school, but did what is known as read for the law. Now they had some culture, but no money. I don't wish to give the impression that we were poor or destitute. But at school I was just not aware of financial differences.

Q. We had talked about grammar school and high school, but did you go on to college?

A. Yes, I attended Northwestern for one year. I got tired of it and decided that it was not for me.

Q. Did many of the graduates of the high school attend college?

A. Some did, but I don't know. People generally didn't talk about it to me. I do know that some members of my class went on, and most of those went to the University of Illinois.





Q. Up to now, we've managed to ignore the school program itself. Mr. Harper, If I asked you to mention, to describe in just a few words your impressions of the high school, what would you say? Of the teaching program, that is.

A. (Chuckle) It was a good, solid, traditional secondary school.

Q. Fine! But you smiled...

A. Questions like that are measure of a man. My English teacher used to say that. "In just a few words..."

Q. Do you recall what courses you took?

A. My program was called the modern language program. I don't know why they chose that name. I do remember that I studied French and German. In my first year I also studied Latin. I studied Latin for two years.

Q. And English, in just a few words...

A. Yes, and English. I remember in my last year I took English Literature. We read Shakespeare. She was a very dramatic English teacher, but she didn't do anything to drum up interest. She was, well, a bore. Just a bore.

Q. You mentioned French and German...

A. Yes, mine was the modern language program. I wasn't really interested. We never did learn to speak the languages. We read them, not spoke them. And of course we read Caesar in second year of Latin class. I don't think that I could read it now, though.

Q. But if I said "amo, amas..."

A. (Chuckle) ...then I could say "amat, amamus, amatis..."

Q. Amant.

A. And agricolorum. Alia jacta est. Some things you just don't ever forget. As I think back, Latin was a good thing. I think that it was more valuable, suitable, and important than either French or German. Especially since we never did learn to speak them.

Q. Did everybody take Latin? I seem to recall that even in my day some, oh, some 17 years ago, all students in a college preparatory program were required to study Latin.

A. Every Freshman was required to study Latin, I think. But if that weren't the case, then I hardly think that I would have done it. Yes, I think that they all had to take a year of Latin. At least one year. And then mathematics. I believe that I studied -- or we all studied mathematics all the way through. First it was algebra, the plane geometry, then solid geometry, and then maybe calculus or maybe advanced algebra. I'm not sure about the last year of mathematics.

Q. That sounds like a rigorous program. And you say it was for all?

A. Yes, it was. Rigorous that is. I know that my program seemed to be more college-oriented than the others, but I don't remember what the other programs were. I suppose that they were much the same. I really don't remember and can't say for sure.

Q. Actually I think we've talked longer than I had originally planned, but could I stop by next week, perhaps Wednesday at the same time?

A. Fine. Good. I'm looking forward to it.



